

**PATENT APPLICATION OF**

**Sean A. Golliher, 325 5th Street, Windsor,  
Colorado 80550,  
Citizenship: US;**

**Scott C. Savage, 2804 Harvard Street, Fort  
Collins, Colorado 80525,  
Citizenship: US;**

**John L. McNitt, 622 Myrtle Street, Fort  
Collins, Colorado 80525,  
Citizenship: US**

**ENTITLED**

**METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR MEASURING SHEET  
RESISTANCE**

**METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR MEASURING SHEET RESISTANCE**FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the measurement of sheet resistance and in particular to  
5 a digital method and apparatus for automatic measurement of sheet resistance of a material on an integrated circuit, for example.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In the design and fabrication of electrical  
10 and electronic components, there is often a need for measuring the sheet resistance of a fabricated material. In the design of a semiconductor integrated circuit, the sheet resistance of materials fabricated on the integrated circuit is often needed  
15 for process and device characterization. For example, sheet resistance is commonly used to evaluate the outcome of semiconductor doping operations. The sheet resistance can be needed for any material or device that is fabricated on the  
20 integrated circuit.

The following example shows one method of defining sheet resistance. If a rectangular block of uniformly doped material has a resistivity  $\rho$ , a length  $L$ , and a cross-sectional area  $A$ , then the  
25 resistance of the rectangular block can be expressed as,

$$R = \rho \frac{L}{A} \quad \text{EQ.1}$$

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If the rectangular block has a width  $W$  and a thickness  $t$ , then the resistance can be rewritten as,

$$R = \frac{\rho}{t} \times \frac{L}{W} = R_s \frac{L}{W} \quad \text{EQ.2}$$

where  $R_s = \rho/t$  is the sheet resistance in ohms of a layer of the material of the block. However, sheet resistance is often expressed in units of "ohms per square," where  $L/W$  is the number of units squares of the material. Therefore, if the sheet resistance of the material is known, the resistance of a particular device formed of that material can be calculated from the number of "squares" of the material in the body of the device.

The typical method of measuring sheet resistance is analog in nature. A known current is inserted into the resistor and the voltages across the resistor are measured so that the sheet resistance for the material can be determined. In the Van der Pauw method, resistivity of a semiconductor is measured by using four probes (contacts) located arbitrarily on the surface of the material. Alternate contacts are used to measure two sets of current-voltage characteristics and then a value of the resistivity is extracted from a formula.

These analog-type methods are rather slow and complex and often require physical access to the material being tested. Improved methods and

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apparatus for measuring sheet resistance of a material are therefore desired.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One embodiment of the present invention is directed to a resistance measurement circuit, which includes a plurality of current sources, a plurality of resistor strings and a comparator. Each resistor string is coupled in series with a respective one of the current sources and includes a plurality of nodes with different resistances relative to a reference node. Each node in each resistor string has a different resistance relative to the reference node than corresponding nodes in the other resistor strings. The comparator has a first comparison input coupled to a reference voltage and a second comparison input selectively coupled to the plurality of nodes in each resistor string.

Another embodiment of the present invention is directed to an integrated circuit test structure. The test structure includes an integrated circuit substrate, a plurality of current sources on the substrate and a plurality of resistor strings on the substrate. Each resistor string is coupled in series with a respective one of the current sources and comprises a plurality of nodes with different resistances relative to a reference node. Each node in each resistor string has a different resistance relative to the reference node than corresponding nodes in the other resistor strings.

Another embodiment of the present invention is directed to a method in which a bias current is passed through a sequence of resistor strings. Each resistor string includes a plurality of nodes with different resistances relative to a reference node. Each node in each resistor string has a progressively different resistance relative to the reference node than corresponding nodes in preceding resistor strings in the sequence. Voltages on successive nodes in a first of the resistor strings are sequentially compared to a reference voltage until a voltage on a selected one of the nodes crosses the reference voltage in a first direction. The voltage on the node corresponding to the selected node in successive ones of the resistor strings in the sequence is compared to the reference voltage until the voltage on a selected one of the resistor strings crosses the reference voltage in a second direction, opposite to the first direction.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating a resistance test structure in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating a resistance measurement circuit for measuring sheet resistance using the test structure shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a state diagram illustrating operation of a first state machine used in the circuit shown in FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 is a state diagram illustrating operation of a second state machine used in the circuit shown in FIG. 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

5           FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating a resistance test structure 10 for measuring sheet resistance of a material in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. Test structure 10 can be constructed of discrete components or  
10 devices that are fabricated on an integrated circuit, for example. In one embodiment, test structure 10 is used for measuring the sheet resistance of N-type and P-type diffusion regions on an integrated circuit. However, test structure 10 can be used to measure the  
15 resistance of any other material fabricated on an integrated.

Test structure 10 includes a plurality of resistor strings that are labeled "RSTRING0" to "RSTRINGm", where m is any integer variable. Each  
20 resistor string RSTRING0-RSTRINGm is coupled between voltage supply terminals VDD and GND and includes a current source 12 and n resistors 14-1 to 14-n connected in series with one another, where n is any integer variable. Voltage supply terminal GND  
25 operates as a reference node. Current source 12 is coupled between supply terminal VDD and the first resistor 14-1. Resistors 14-1 to 14-n are coupled between current source 12 and reference terminal GND.

Current source 12 supplies a predetermined  
30 bias  $I_{bias}$  to resistors 14-1 to 14-n. The bias

current  $I_{bias}$  can be a known off-chip current or an internally generated current from a bandgap circuit reference, for example. Other type of current sources can also be used.

5               Resistors 14-1 to 14-n are formed of geometrically defined material that is fabricated on the integrated circuit, such as diffusion regions or predefined lengths of conductive segments. All resistors have a substantially identical geometry,  
10 with the same length, width and thickness of material that forms the body of the resistor. Therefore, each resistor can be thought of as having a unit resistance  $R$ . However, other ratios of resistances and combinations of resistor values can be used in  
15 alternative embodiments of the present invention.

Each resistor string has a plurality of voltage taps or nodes with different resistances relative to the reference node at reference terminal GND. For example, RSTRING0 has  $n$  taps labeled "T10"  
20 to "Tn0", wherein the first digit in the reference numeral indicates the tap number in the resistor string and the second digit represents the string number. Accordingly, any given tap "i" in resistor string "j" can therefore be referred to as  $T_{ij}$ , where  
25  $i = 1$  to  $n$  and  $j = 0$  to  $m$ .

Each resistor string "RSTRINGj" has a least significant resistor 14-n, which is coupled between a least significant tap  $T_{nj}$  and reference terminal GND. This least significant tap  $T_{nj}$  has the lowest voltage

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relative to reference terminal GND as compared to the other taps in the string.

Each tap in each resistor string has a different resistance relative to reference terminal GND than their corresponding taps in the other resistors strings. This is accomplished in the embodiment shown in FIG. 1 by coupling a different number of least significant resistors 14-n in parallel with one another between taps  $T_{nj}$  and reference terminal GND in each resistor string.

In the example shown in FIG. 1, each resistor string "RSTRINGj" has  $2^j$  resistors 14-n connected in parallel with one another between its least significant tap  $T_{nj}$  and reference terminal GND. Therefore, each tap  $T_{ij}$  in each resistor string has a different resistance relative to reference terminal GND than the corresponding taps in the other resistor strings.

If resistor strings RSTRING0 - RSTRINGm are considered a sequence of resistor strings, then each set of corresponding taps  $T_{ij}$  (where "i" is constant and "j" ranges from 0 to m) have progressively varying resistances within the sequence. For example in the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, each tap in each resistor string has a smaller resistance relative to the reference terminal GND than the corresponding tap in the next preceding resistor string in the sequence and a larger resistance relative than the corresponding tap in the next succeeding resistor string in the sequence. However, the resistances can



progressively increase or progressively decrease within the sequence in alternative embodiments. Also, the amount at which the resistances increase or decrease can also vary in alternative embodiments.

5           With this structure, taps  $T_{ij}$  provide a plurality of different voltages that can be compared with a reference voltage for successively approximating the unit resistance  $R$  of resistors 14-1 to 14-n. From this resistance, the sheet resistance  
10 of the material within each resistor body can be calculated.

The voltage developed on each tap  $T_{ij}$  as a result of the bias current  $I_{bias}$  flowing through the resistor string is selectively coupled to a  
15 respective node  $N_{ij}$  for measurement through a respective switch  $SW_{ij}$  without adding any switching resistances within the series connection between voltage supply terminals VDD and GND. As described in more detail below, this reduces the measurement error  
20 introduced by the test structure.

FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating an example of a resistance measurement circuit that can be used for measuring sheet resistance using the test structure shown in FIG. 1. Resistance  
25 measurement circuit 20 includes a control circuit 22, such as a finite state machine, a comparator 24 and a register block 26. State machine 22 has a system clock input 30 labeled SYSTEM CLK, a reset input 32 labeled RESET, a plurality of node inputs 34 labeled  
30  $N_{10}$  to  $N_{nm}$ , a plurality of switch control outputs 36

labeled SW10 to SWnm, a selected tap output 38 labeled TAPX, a capture control output 40 labeled CAPTURE and a compare result input 42 labeled COMPOUT.

5               Node inputs 34 are coupled to respective nodes N10 to Nnm, respectively, in test structure 10 (shown in FIG. 1) for receiving the voltages on taps T10 to Tnm when a respective switch SW10 to SWnm is closed. State machine 22 controls the states  
10 switches of SW10 to SWnm through switch control outputs 36. Switch control outputs 36 are coupled to respective control terminals of switches SW10 to SWnm. When state machine 22 activates a particular switch control output SWij to close a corresponding  
15 switch in test structure 10, state machine 22 couples the corresponding voltage on node Nij to the selected tap output 38 (TAPX). State machine 22 couples only one node Nij to TAPX at one time.

Comparator 24 has a first comparison input  
20 50, a second comparison input 52 and a comparison output 56. First comparison input 50 is coupled to a reference voltage VREF, and second comparison input 52 is coupled to the selected tap output TAPX. Reference voltage VREF is held to a known voltage  
25 level, which can be an off-chip voltage or an internally known bandgap circuit voltage, for example.

Comparator 24 generates comparison output  
COMPOUT on output 56 as a result of a comparison  
30 between VREF and TAPX. In one embodiment, COMPOUT

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has a logic low value when the voltage on TAPX is less than the voltage on VREF and has a logic high value when the voltage on TAPX is higher than the voltage on VREF. Comparison output 56 is coupled to  
5 compare result input 42 of state machine 22 such that state machine 22 can monitor the state of COMPOUT with each comparison of TAPX. In one embodiment, comparator 24 is an auto-zeroed comparator having an effective input-referred offset voltage of zero.  
10 However, other types of comparators, compare circuits or compare processors can also be used.

Once a selected tap in test structure 10 has been located that has a voltage, which approximates the voltage on VREF, state machine 22  
15 activates capture control output 40 to clock register block 26. Register block 26 has a plurality of data inputs 60 coupled to respective switch control outputs SW10 to SWnm and a plurality of data outputs 62 labeled DATAOUT. When register block 26 is  
20 clocked, the register block latches the states on SW10 to SWnm onto DATAOUT.

State machine 22 is configured to perform a predetermined test sequence. FIGS. 3 and 4 illustrate state diagrams implementing a test  
25 sequence according to one embodiment of the present invention. However, other test sequences or processes can be used in alternative embodiments of the present invention. FIG. 3 illustrates the states of a first state machine A, and FIG. 4 illustrates

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the states of a second state machine B, which together form state machine 22 shown in FIG. 2.

Referring to FIG. 3, state Machine A has  $n$  states labeled "1" to " $n$ ". State Machine A enters state "1" when reset input 32 is activated to begin a test sequence. Also, comparator 24 is auto-zeroed on reset. The test sequence begins by looking for a tap on the first resistor string, RSTRING0, that has a voltage that is higher than VREF.

After reset, state machine A holds only the control input to switch SW $n$ 0 in resistor string RSTRING0 high, thereby connecting the voltage on tap T $n$ 0 to the TAPX input of comparator 24. The voltage on tap T $n$ 0 has a value of  $I_{bias} \cdot R$ . If the voltage on tap T $n$ 0 is less than VREF, then comparator output COMPOUT remains low and state Machine A transits to its next state, state "2".

In state "2", only switch SW( $n-1$ )0 in string RSTRING0 is closed to connect tap T( $n-1$ )0 to TAPX. The voltage on tap T( $n-1$ )0 is given by  $I_{bias} \cdot 2R$ , which is compared to the known voltage VREF. If the voltage on tap T( $n-1$ )0 is less than VREF, COMPOUT remains low and state machine transits to the next state and configures the switches in string RSTRING0 such that switch SW( $n-2$ )0 is closed.

As soon as the voltage on one of the taps T10 to T $n$ 0 is connected to TAPX and has a voltage greater than VREF, COMPOUT will go high. When COMPOUT goes high, state Machine A returns from its current state to state "1". At this point, state

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machine 22 can activate capture control output CAPTURE to register the states of switches SW10 to SWn0 in register block 26. Alternatively, the states of these switches are preserved and registered at the  
5 end of the overall test sequence.

State machine B has  $m+1$  states labeled "1" to " $m+1$ ", as shown in FIG. 4. When COMPOUT goes high, state machine B transits from state "1" to state "2" to initiate the second phase of the test  
10 sequence. In the second phase, state machine B moves from state to state in order to sequentially couple the corresponding tap in each successive one of the resistor strings, RSTRING1 to RSTRINGM, in the sequence to TAPX until COMPOUT transitions from the  
15 high state back to the low state.

Assuming COMPOUT changed state in FIG. 3 with the comparison of the voltage on the "ith" tap  $Ti0$  in RSTRING0, then state machine B tests each of the corresponding "ith" taps in strings RSTRING1 to  
20 RSTRINGm until COMPOUT goes low. These taps belong to a set of corresponding taps  $Tij$  in FIG. 1, wherein "i" is fixed and j ranges from 0 to m.

When state machine B enters state "2", switch SW11 is closed and the voltage on  $Ti1$  is  
25 compared with VREF. The voltage on  $Ti1$  is less than the voltage on corresponding tap  $Ti0$ . In the example shown in FIG. 1, the voltage on  $Ti1$  is less than the voltage on  $Ti0$  by  $I_{bias} \cdot (1/2)R$ . If the voltage on  $Ti1$  is greater than VREF, COMPOUT remains high and  
30 state machine B enters state "3". In state "3", the

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voltage on  $Ti_2$  is compared with  $V_{REF}$ . The voltage on  $Ti_2$  is less than the voltage on  $Ti_0$  by  $I_{bias} \cdot (1/4)R$ .

This process continues until one of the corresponding taps in  $RSTRING_1$  to  $RSTRING_m$  is activated such that  $COMPOUT$  changes to a low state. Once  $COMPOUT$  changes to a low state, state machine B returns to state "1" and activates the capture control output  $COMPOUT$  to register the states of switches  $SW_{10}$  to  $SW_m$  in register block 26. Alternatively, the states of the switches in a particular resistor string can be latched after the voltages on that string have been tested.

Once the test sequence has completed, the latched values of  $SW_{10}$  to  $SW_m$  on  $DATAOUT$  can be decoded to estimate the value of  $R$ , from which the sheet resistance can be approximated. The decoding can be performed by combinational logic, a look up table or a programmed computer, for example.

In order to calculate the upper and lower bounds of the resistance measurement, the value of  $R$  is calculated for the last resistor string in the sequence that caused the comparator output to switch low and the previous resistor string in the sequence that caused the comparator output to switch high. Suppose the comparator output switched high on the "ith" tap  $Ti_0$  in  $RSTRING_0$  and switched low on tap  $Ti_j$  in the "jth" string  $RSTRING_j$ . The upper and low bounds for the resistance are given by solving the following equation for  $R$  once for each string

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(assuming there are no errors in the bias current  $I_{bias}$  or the reference voltage  $V_{REF}$ ),

$$(n-i) \cdot R + \frac{R}{2^j} = \frac{V}{I_{bias}} \quad \text{EQ. 3}$$

5           For example, if there are 3 series resistors in each string ( $n=3$ ) and if the comparator output switched high on the 2nd tap T20 ( $i=2$ ) in RSTRING0 ( $j=0$ ) and switched low on the 2nd tap T23 ( $i=2$ ) in RSTRING3 ( $j=3$ ), then the upper bound from  
10 EQ. 3 would be  $2R$  and the lower bound would be  $R+1/8R$ .

If there are  $n$  taps per resistor string and  $m$  resistor strings in test structure 10, the resolution of the system is  $2^{(n+(m-1))}$ .

15           For a desired resolution of  $n$  bits, test structure 10 uses  $m \cdot 2^{n/2} + 2^m$  resistors if we assume that first resistor string will have a resolution  $2^{n/2}$ . Any combination  $n$  and  $m$  can be used to trade off the desired number of total resistors versus the total  
20 number of resistor string stages.

As mentioned above, the test structure shown in FIG. 1 reduces measurement error associated with the switching of resistors into and out of the circuit. Each string is free of any switching  
25 resistance in the series path through the resistors. The switches  $SW_{ij}$  are connected to taps in the resistor strings, in series with the inputs to the comparator, rather than in series with the resistors. By using multiple resistor strings as shown in FIG.

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1, the switching resistances can be removed from the measurement. If instead a multiplexing approach were used to switch resistors into and out of a single resistor string, an error would result from adding  
5 switching resistance in the series path through the resistors.

The sheet resistance measurement circuit shown in FIGS 1-4 provides a digital, successive approximation method of automatically measuring sheet  
10 resistance of any fabricated material on an integrated circuit. With the use of a system clock, digital logic and a comparator, a digital output word can be stored and decoded to give an approximate value of sheet resistance for the material. This  
15 digital method is superior to traditional methods in terms of measurement speed, test complexity package pin and tester pin use.

Although the present invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments,  
20 workers skilled in the art will recognize that changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, any suitable control circuit can be used for controlling the test sequence. A finite state  
25 machine is provided only as an example. Also, the test sequence can run in any direction. The resistance can be progressively increased along the first string as described above or can be progressively decreased along the first string in an  
30 alternative embodiment. Also, successive resistor



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strings can have successively increasing resistances at corresponding nodes or successively decreasing resistances. Also, the amount and increments at which the resistances are increased or decreased can  
5 be modified in alternative embodiments of the present invention.